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**Halifax Regional Council**  
**December 13, 2005**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Betty MacDonald  
Betty MacDonald, Director, Governance & Strategic Initiatives

**DATE:** November 28, 2005

**SUBJECT:** Update -Alternative Voting Options

## **INFORMATION REPORT**

### **ORIGIN**

On February 10, 2004, Halifax Regional Council approved a motion requesting that staff examine complementary voting alternatives in preparation for the 2008 Municipal Election. Further to this request the Municipal Clerk provided Council with a verbal update regarding this matter on October 18, 2005, indicating that a report would be submitted to Council in December 2005.

## **BACKGROUND**

Halifax Regional Municipality administers Municipal and School Board elections every four years and Special Elections as required. HRM is comprised of 23 polling districts with approximately 10,000 to 12,000 eligible voters per district for an approximate total in 2004 of 276,000 eligible voters.

Halifax Regional Council consists of one Councillor elected from each of the 23 districts and a Mayor elected at large. Halifax Regional School Board is comprised of 12 Board members, one elected per electoral district, and one African Nova Scotian representative elected at large by entitled voters. In most cases, school board districts contain two or more municipal polling districts. HRM also conducts elections for the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) electing three members at large to the Board by entitled voters. During any election the Province or Council can direct the Returning Officer (Municipal Clerk) to hold a plebiscite to seek the opinion or approval of the electorate on a particular issue to be held with a general or special election.

Currently HRM utilizes only traditional paper ballots, with each matter having a separate ballot. For example, one ballot for the election of the Mayor, one for the District Councillor, and one for each School Board representative. In 2004, each voter could have received up to four different ballots, Mayor, Council, School Board and Provincial Plebiscite (CSAP and African Nova Scotia candidates were acclaimed).

## **DISCUSSION**

Over the past several years Council has expressed a strong desire to have staff explore alternative voting methods. During the month of October, the Municipal Clerk along with an election staff person had the opportunity to observe the municipal election in St. John's, Newfoundland, which utilized mail in ballots. In addition to observing the results of this method of voting, the Municipal Clerk has personal experience with alternative voting methods and agrees that this is an excellent opportunity to explore new alternatives for HRM.

Along with the traditional paper ballots, there are several voting methods currently available, such as, but not limited to, internet, telephone, voting by mail, consolidated ballots, voting machines, etc. In order to determine the most suitable voting method(s) for HRM's unique geographic region and traditional voting methods, it is necessary to undertake a comprehensive review of alternative voting mechanisms.

In November, the Municipal Clerk undertook the development of an Expression of Interest (EOI) as a first step to determine an alternative voting method or combination of voting methods suitable for HRM. The EOI seeks to identify companies with experience in providing election services and alternatives to the voting methods currently utilized by HRM. Vendors were requested to have experience with providing services to Municipal, Provincial, and/or Federal elections.

## **DISCUSSION CONTD**

It is our intention that any method chosen be fully accredited, and ensures the integrity of the election process. Alternative voting solutions should meet HRM's objectives of increasing access to voters in HRM and increasing voter participation. Vendors will also be responsible to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of any voting method put forward for consideration.

Following the December 21, 2005, closing date for the Expression of Interest, an Evaluation Committee will be struck to review the submissions. Jan Gibson, Municipal Clerk, will maintain overall responsibility for the process and the Evaluation Committee will consist of a number of qualified individuals including: Cathy Mellett, Client Services, Shared Services, who will coordinate the evaluation of technical architecture and interface with HRM technology; Cathie Osborne, Business Systems and Control Group, Financial Services, who will evaluate the robustness of the auditing capability of the various methods; Karen Brown, Senior Solicitor, Legal Services, to ensure that each alternative satisfies all necessary legal requirements; Barb Palmeter, Financial Consultant, who will evaluate the cost effectiveness of the proposed methods; as well as, Bernie White, Municipal Clerk, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, who as an unbiased third party has a comprehensive understanding of the election process in Nova Scotia and brings his years of experience to the process.

In addition to the results received through the Expression of Interest, a team of graduate students in the Masters of Public Administration program at Dalhousie University have been enlisted by the Municipal Clerk to research election best practices from cities across Canada including, Markham, St. John's, Calgary, Vancouver and Edmonton.

The Municipal Clerk will continue to share the progress of this initiative with the Province and Service Nova Scotia & Municipal Relations as any alternative method must address the particular qualifications of the voter for School Board, African Nova Scotia and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) .

When the deadline for the Expression of Interest has been met, the next steps include, evaluation of EOI submissions by the Evaluation Committee, this will be followed by a report to Council on results of the EOI and recommending alternative voting options for Council's consideration. . The final step in the process will be to proceed to a Request for Proposal (RFP) and the creation of the appropriate by-laws to govern the alternatives or methods that are adopted.

## **BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

To be outlined in future progress reports on this subject.

## **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN**

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of

Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

**ALTERNATIVES**

To be outlined in future reports.

**ATTACHMENTS**

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by :

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Jan Gibson, Municipal Clerk